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"Nascetur Ridiculus Mus"

—OR—

Polygamy in the Greensboro Assembly

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Polygamy in the Greensboro Assembly.

I have in hand all the documents that lie immediately back of the action of the Greensboro General Assembly of 1908, on polygamy. For the benefit of those interested and who were not present on the occasion of this action, and this would include more than two-thirds of the commissioners to that body, who were then absent, I propose to submit a compilation of these documents, with some notes and comments. It is a rare bit of Church history.

The record of these proceedings in the Minutes of this Assembly is very defective and unsatisfactory. This will become evident from what follows, and it emphasizes the importance of this review and criticism.

It may be helpful, as a preliminary, to recall to mind that the sole question before our Church on this subject is this: How shall our ministers, at home and abroad, deal with the sin of adultery? Shall they, or any of them, under any circumstances baptize or hold sacred Christian communion with persons living in this sin? Do you indignantly reply, No! Then, please pause and consider whether you are not flying right in the face of our General Assembly which says, Yes! Beyond controversy, polygamy is *adultery;* and yet, tolerance of it is the attitude of the last General Assembly.

What is adultery? It is adultery when any man, Christian or heathen, with a wife, cohabits with any

other woman than his one lawful wife; or when any married woman cohabits with any other than her one lawful husband. Divorce is the lawful separation, by death or otherwise, of a wife or husband, by the dissolution of the legal marriage bond. Separation from an adulterous alliance with a concubine or mistress is not a divorce. These radical distinctions are valid both legally and scripturally.

Our Assembly's Committee, continued, of which Rev. R. W. Jopling is chairman, on Marriage and Divorce, stated in their report to the late Assembly, that they have government statistics which show that over twelve hundred thousand (1,200,000) divorces have been granted by the Courts, U. S. A., in the last twenty years. And adultery is the chief cause. This is over five thousand a month, and more than three times more than in the previous twenty years.

When such is the appalling condition of things at home, does it become any Christian Church to give or to allow itself by any equivocal attitude, to be understood as giving the least or remotest countenance to this sin of adultery in mission work or otherwise?*

The sin of adultery, which is primarily a violation of a law of nature, is the same the world over. The sin is the same with heathen as with Christians. Anyone who recognizes our Lord Jesus Christ as a teacher of authority would be stultified by denying this, for Christ unequivocally teaches that at creation God ordained monogamy for the human race.

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*See Assembly Minutes of 1908 p. 108 and p. 62. The Committee on Marriage and Divorce is rebuked for a pertinent and legitimate deprecatory allusion to the position of our Assembly on this subject. Is not insistence on the Scriptural view of the conjugal relation the best antidote for divorce?

Monogamy is a doctrine of natural religion founded in Eden. The Saviour does not originate it but appropriates it from the natural sphere, as he does the Sabbath and sanctifies both. "And he (Jesus) answered and said. Have ye not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female and said: For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they two shall become one flesh; so they are no more two, but one flesh. What, therefore, God hath joined together, let no man put asunder." (Matt. xix: 4-6). Paul writes (1 Cor. vii: 2): "Let each man have his own wife (not wives), and let each woman have her own husband (not husbands)."

Ignorance may mitigate the degree of guilt, but it never alters the character of any sin, great or small. Our church standards are therefore scripturally and ethically correct when they place polygamy by man or woman, under the seventh commandment as adultery. (Larger Cat. Q. 139, Con. F. Ch. xxiv:1). The plural departures from monogamy are plural adulteries.

All assert and concede that polygamy is a sin. But what kind of a sin? It is not murder, nor lying, nor theft; then what is it? It is impossible to explain or classify it otherwise than as the sin of adultery, as above defined. Polygamy is the fact and adultery is the immorality or the sinfulness of that fact. This is definite and absolutely irrefutable.

Now for the documents which serve to show whether, instead of forbidding all quarter to this vile and implacable foe of all righteousness, of all social and family purity and well-being, whether its treatment is or is not relegated by the Greensboro deliverance of the General Assembly to the frail discre-

tion of the individual missionary, thus suspending the good name of our church on an individual discretion, a discretion, by the way, which the standards of our church wisely do not allow even to the General Assembly itself? Of course, such an act would be *ultra vires* and void of validity. The question is not an open question, but is closed by the constitution of our church. And no power on earth can break its seal except the will of this organized body by burning, as Prof. Reed suggests, or changing its constitution. Actions of a General Assembly unauthorized by or in contravention of that constitution are not only invalid and destitute of legitimate authority over individuals and inferior courts, but wicked usurpations and despotic. Hence, as an Assembly may err, no individual Assembly can bind a subsequent Assembly. The individual Assemblies, like legislatures, are transient. The constitution alone is permanent and binding.

NO. I. OVERTURE FROM EASTERN TEXAS PRESBYTERY.

Whereas, by a former action of the General Assembly, (at Mobile, 1904), it has been understood that our foreign missionaries, if in their discretion it should seem best to do so, were authorized by the Assembly to receive into church membership professed converts among the heathen who were living in known practice of polygamy;

Therefore, Resolved, that the Presbytery of Eastern Texas hereby overtures our General Assembly, requesting the Assembly, through its foreign missionary secretaries, to direct all our foreign missionaries to receive no more professed converts from the heathen into church membership, if such converts are living in the practice of polygamy.

Adopted by the Presbytery of Eastern Texas in session at Groveton, Texas, April 17, 1908.

Attest: F. E. Robbins, Stated Clerk of Eastern Texas Presbytery.

A true copy: W. A. Alexander, Stated Clerk.

There are two things to be noted now in this overture:

1. One is the persistent and spreading dissatisfaction with the deliverance of the General Assembly at Mobile, four years since.
2. The overture only asks that no more polygamists be received, but takes no account of those already received in both Africa and China.

NO. 2. ANSWER PROPOSED BY THE COMMITTEE ON BILLS AND OVERTURES.

The Assembly declares unequivocally,

1st. Polygamy is in violation of the scriptural law of marriage.

2nd. That members of our church in the foreign field should not be allowed to enter into plural marriages.

3rd. That our missionaries should be careful to maintain the Scriptural view of marriage.

4th. And yet, that on the principles obtaining in the Old Testament History, namely: the gradual revelation of law, there may be cases so peculiar that much patience must be exercised by the missionaries in dealing with them: and cases to be decided upon only after careful consultation of all members of the Mission Stations in which such cases may arise.

J. E. Jones, Chairman.

A true copy: W. A. Alexander, Stated Clerk.

This answer (1) denies the petition of the overture, and (2) reasserts the position of the Mobile Assembly with a modicum of advice, and (3) in support of admitting and tolerating polygamists now in Christian communion, lays down, as a criterion of judgment, "the gradual revelation of law," on the conjugal relation, in direct contradiction of the teaching of Christ, Matt. xix:4-6.

No. 3. The following is Mr. Harrison's substitute for the report of the Committee of Bills and Overtures:

Whereas, there are more than half a million actual

polygamists in that portion of the heathen world allotted to the Presbyterian Church in the United States, as its special missionary field, not to speak of other fields; and

Whereas, the standards of our Church, the deliverances of the General Assembly, and of Christian people generally, arraign this perversion of the conjugal relation as a sin against God; and

Whereas, no profession of faith in Christ should be recognized as credible when the person making it refuses to renounce the world, the flesh and the devil, that is, all known sin; Therefore, Be It Resolved,

1st. That the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, now in session, enjoin upon all her ministers at home and abroad, to withhold its sacred rites of Baptism and Christian Communion from all persons in this sinful relation, till it be renounced and abandoned.

2nd. That this General Assembly direct all of its Presbyteries to call on their ministers to comply with Section 78 of the Form of Government; to report annually on this as one of the topics within their care, especially in heathen lands.

3rd. That this General Assembly, in order to render the explicit provisions of the constitution of our Church operative without further delay, on this subject, instruct and direct the executive committee of Foreign Missions to faithfully see to it that baptism and Christian Communion be withheld by our missionaries from all persons in this sinful, polygamous relation, till it is renounced and they show themselves conformable to the requirements of domestic decency and the example of a Christian life.

A true copy: W. A. Alexander, Stated Clerk.

This paper of Elder Dabney Carr Harrison, of Washington, D. C., (1) sustains the overture, and (2) makes good its deficiency by providing for the removal from Christian communion all persons living in polygamous adultery.

"Mr. Harrison spoke in support of his substitute. He thought the action proposed did not go far enough and was based on a false principle. There

was no gradual revelation of the law of monogamy, nor of the seventh commandment on adultery. The Confession of faith is plain, and it is as true in Africa as in Greensboro."

"Rev. J. P. Robertson, as reported, contended that the New Testament principle in the Epistle to Timothy that the deacon should be the husband of one wife, ought to settle the question. It places the ban upon polygamous office bearers."

The belated intelligence of the opposition to this substitute was simply painful.

NO. 4. THE DR. CURRY SUBSTITUTE NO. 1 FOR BILLS AND OVERTURES REPORT ON TEXAS OVERTURE. "RESOLUTIONS ON POLYGAMY.

"The resolution of Mr. D. C. Harrison on polygamy was docketed to come up in connection with the report of the Committee on Bills and Overtures on this subject. The following resolution was offered by Rev. A. B. Curry and docketed to come up with the same report:

"The Assembly sympathizes with the many difficulties which our missionaries encounter in practically applying the teachings of Christianity to conditions in heathen lands, and realizes that much must be left to the discretion of the missionaries upon the ground. At the same time the Assembly affectionately enjoins upon our missionaries not to compromise any of the principles of our holy religion by admitting to church membership persons who are known to be living in native customs, which are essentially contrary to the teachings of Christ, as for example that of polygamy or any form of idolatry.

"A. B. CURRY."

(Christian Observer Special, p. 22, col. 1.).

This Dr. Curry paper No. 1, (1) sustains the petition of the overture that no more polygamists be received, and (2) gives the unanswerable reason for doing so, that polygamy is "essentially contrary to the teachings of Christ," just as much so as idolatry;

but (3) it makes no provision for those polygamists already received into communion.

No. 4 was also docketed. These documents went to the docket Wednesday and were not called up till Friday afternoon.

NO. 5. THE DR. CURRY SUBSTITUTE NO. 2.

The Assembly sympathizes with our missionaries in the many difficulties they encounter in practically applying the teachings of Christianity to conditions in heathen lands, and realizes that much must be left to the discretion of the missionaries on the ground.

At the same time the Assembly affectionately enjoins on our missionaries that in dealing with questions arising out of these conditions, such as, for example, the prevalence of polygamy or of ancestral worship and other forms of idolatry, they ought all to be very careful not to compromise the honor of our church or any of the principles of our holy religion, nor to pursue any policy that would fail to make it plain either to the church at home, or to the native churches, or to the heathen themselves, that such customs and practices are to be condemned as contrary to the law of Christ as revealed in the Scriptures.

A true copy of paper adopted by the General Assembly at Greensboro, May, 1908. W. A. Alexander, Stated Clerk.

Friday afternoon, when the Texas overture was taken from the docket, Dr. Curry was permitted to withdraw his substitute No. 1, and he submitted in place of it, No. 2, which was at once entertained. That so many knew, before hand, that this change was going to be made attracted some attention.

Please notice that this Dr. Curry paper No. 2, "enjoins on our missionaries that they ought all to be very careful not to compromise the honor of our church, or any of the principles of our holy religion, nor to pursue any policy," etc. These are individual admonitions and exhortations. There is no

order, no rule of action laid down. Could anything be plainer than that this is simply and only earnest advice to the missionaries to be very careful or prudent in exercising their discretion in admitting or rejecting polygamist and idolatrous applicants for recognition as Christians by baptism and Christian fellowship? They may admit them if in their individual judgment it is best to do so. The fact of polygamy is not made a barrier. And as to whether some of them may not think best to do so will appear later. This paper No. 2 has forgotten the explicit and unanswerable reason in No. 1 for not admitting them under any circumstances because it is "essentially contrary to the teachings of Christ." Does it not seem strange that a matter confessed and declared to be "essentially contrary to the teachings of Christ," in No. 1, should be left, in No. 2, to the discretion of any man or set of men? What could have so radically changed Dr. Curry's views in a few hours as to leave it to the individual missionary? A thing essential is thus made contingent and optional with the missionary. Upon what meat does this Caesar feed that he should be exalted above his Lord? In truth, all ordained ministers are on the same footing in dealing with sin. In the report of the Bills and Overtures committee, extreme cases were to be decided "by all the members of the Mission Stations in which such cases may arise." (Clause 4). Not so in Dr. Curry No. 2. It enjoins all missionaries individually to be very prudent in the exercise of a power which, by our Presbyterian standards, is lawless and impious. That is all. No order, no definite course or rule laid down. According to Presbyterian order, this is the anarchy and impiety of individualism.

There are two things, however, that ought to be

noted in this deliverance at Greensboro, given above: (1) One is that it gives advice, whereas the sorry deliverance at Mobile four years ago, which banked wholly on the "piety and discretion" of the missionaries themselves in the foreign field, deemed it "unnecessary to make even an advisory deliverance on the subject." But now urgent advice is given. It is hoped the dear missionaries will not take offence, especially so, as now we wake up to the glaring fact that our pious and discreet missionaries, with free allowance by the General Assembly and Executive Committee of Foreign Missions, are consorting with scores of baptized heathen so-called converts, men and women, openly and shamelessly living in polygamous adultery, Christian-Presbyterian adultery! Rev. J. E. Phipps, (a full-blooded negro of St. Christopher's Island, West Indies, and in connection with the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., who has been in our pay for about twelve years in the Congo, though not at all subject to our discipline) spent an evening in my study last November. And whilst, as a negro, characteristically reserved in speaking of others, yet he acknowledged that he had baptized a polygamist with four wives; and also that he knew of eight or ten polygamist families among the baptized negro converts about Luebo and Ibanj.

If Phipps personally knew of that many families among the six or seven thousand reported "Church members," and it was an understood thing there, he told me, that the missionaries would baptize them, it is only reasonable to suppose that the whole number of persons in all of those sample familes counts up scores. And why should it not be so, when a man of Dr. W. M. Morrison's "piety and discretion," the ruling spirit of that African Mission, is avowedly in favor of admitting polygamists as the means of re-

forming them, pleading the stale and utterly fictitious and thoroughly refuted pretence of polygamy in the apostolic church? (Polygamy and Citizenship, p. 15). During Dr. Morrison's absence in this country for two or three years, receiving polygamists was checked up, as the *Kassai Herald* informed us, but his return restored the previous state. And then, another of our missionaries, in China, is now at home and under indictment for baptizing a polygamist, who, on deliberately and persistently refusing to renounce his polygamous state for two years, was at last, on the agreed advice of members of the Hchoufu Station, China, baptized and is now with his wives, in fellowship as a church member. His Presbytery in South Carolina is performing the most extraordinary ecclesiastical feats to avoid prosecuting this missionary of our church who did the baptizing. His case, as matter of fact, rests wholly on his undisputed personal confession, accompanied or preceded by a challenge to make the best of it as the General Assembly had sanctioned it. His Presbytery has twice refused to consider the indictment and a second complaint to Synod is now pending.

I could give the name of a returned missionary of our church, from China, now living comfortably at home, who uses, and has effectively used, the following language on this subject in influencing previous action: "His (God's) way of dealing with it (polygamy) then seems to be somewhat thus: He would tolerate it *pro tem* lest the radical method of dealing with the relation where existing should inflict greater injustice and wrong to all parties than would its temporary continuance. . . Generally he likes his second better than his first wife for she is his own and not the choice of his parents."

He continues: "It (polygamy) is his refuge for

home affection and it would be hard for me to say to him, you must cease to live with the one you love and cohabit with another when I have been taught to believe that a loveless union is little short of legalized adultery."

Here we have the free-love opinion of one of our own missionaries of long experience who has been since his return honored with the title of D. D., by one of our church colleges, and this opinion was put forth to influence, and did influence, previous ecclesiastical action along the very line of Dr. Curry's counsel.

Take another case, that of one of our own ministers now at work in China, who holds and has published recklessly, one might say, his defence of admitting polygamists and not altogether careful restrictions, in some cases amounting to what is repelled in fact as misrepresentation and abuse of such ignoramuses as myself, who differ from him. Now, here is his view in his own language: "My own view is . . . when one in ignorance of the law of God has assumed the responsibilities of a husband to more than one wife or concubine, *to retract his course* would be *more sinful than to remain* in it; therefore in the case of apparently genuine repentance on the part of such a one, he should be received into the church with due instruction as to the heinousness of *his sin,* warning as to the future, and being reckoned as being *ineligible* to hold office in the church." (Italics are his.)

Only think of it: *husband of a concubine,* admitted with the guilt of his *heinous sin* unrenounced! Hence unrepented.

Incredible and absurd as these views of men in the ministry of our own church and communion may seem, which views some would esteem disgraceful to

a mere tyro in ethics and casuistry, all religion aside, yet, as a matter of fact, they do not stand alone. If these brethren, whose views I have cited, desire it, I can give their names. But the point to which I now wish to ask attention, without increasing the list of delinquents and taxing further patience, is this: What prospect is there, then, that advice, however urgent and affectionate, will influence persons conscientiously holding such views to the extent of restraining them from exercising their individual pious discretion in favor of admitting polygamists in the future as they have done and stood ready to do, in the past? It may be safely affirmed that from a merely practical point of view, the action in question is ecclesiastical quackery.

It is, besides, seriously apprehended that this failure to publicly and positively place the ban of prohibitive disapproval upon this evil practice, under all circumstances, by an unequivocal proclamation in accordance with the explicit provisions of our church standards, cannot and will not be esteemed otherwise than unfortunate. Left free, self-consistency may and will displace consistency with the law of Christ.

It is especially unfortunate in the presence of at least twenty millions of actual polygamists, with their harems of degraded women, in the non-christian and semi-civilized foreign mission lands, whilst in our homeland, continental and insular, passing by the laxness among our ten millions of negroes, many of our two to three hundred thousand Indians are by custom living in polygamy; and it may still be said, that we have in our midst an organized adulterous community of polygamists, with their state representatives formally seated in our Senate Chamber and with their following actually

imperiling our monogamous legal attitude, not to speak of the concealed multitude of adulterous plural lives, as revealed in the daily divorce proceedings in our courts. Now and then the guilty ones are sent by the courts as felonious criminals to the penitentiaries.

How strangely and stupidly obstinate it is, in view of the state of fact, for our ministers to persistently ignore the home relations of this subject and to speak and legislate uopn it as if an exclusively foreign affair, and consequently subject to a different gospel and ethical standard. This Serbonian bog is in the path-way of home as well as foreign Christian work. May I ask? Did you take note of the surprising fact that Senator Foraker, as Chairman of the Minority Committee in the Smoot case, quoted extensivly from Missionaries favoring polygamy, in favor of seating Smoot; and that "he won out" for him? And some of this pernicious aid was from Presbyterian missionaries. Shame on them! And the position of our General Assemblies was at the time also notorious.

Quackery is not the way to deal with such a portentous evil.

I know of no wiser or more befitting counsel than that expressed in a letter from one of our experienced lady medical missionaries, dated Suchien, China, February 3, 1906. She writes:

Dr. S. S. Laws, Washington, D. C.

Dear Sir: I feel that in your agitating the question of polygamy in the foreign field, that we women missionaries may have a say. I have been a hearty sympathizer in the movement, and hope you will not let it rest where the Synod of Virginia left it. Missionaries are men of many minds, and so important a matter should not be left to them as individuals.

I say baptism should be deferred until the Lord opens up the way. The Roman Catholics allow none in their church.

. . . . .

Yours in the common cause,

ANNIE H. PATTERSON,

(Wife of Rev. A. Craig Patterson, Missionary, of Lexington Presbytery, Va.)

(2) The second thing to which I am able, as having been present, to call attention as showing the equivocalness and impotence of the Dr. Curry resolution No. 2, adopted by the late General Assembly, is the irregular and surprising colloquy which occurred on the floor of the Assembly, immediately after the vote and before any other business was taken up. I shall attach no importance now to the fact that fewer than one-third of the enrolled commissioners were present, only about 50 out of 201, and that the action was within the impatient last hour of the Assembly. Immediately after the vote was announced, an elder arose and asked if the action taken did not put the admission of polygamists in the discretion of the missionaries? The question produced something of a flurry? Then the Rev. J. E. Jones, D. D., of Meridian, Mississippi, who had served as Chairman of the Committee of Bills and Overtures, whose report is published above, arose and, addressing the moderator, said: "If the resolution adopted does not leave the subject to the discretion of the missionaries I would not have voted for it." Rev. R. A. Robinson, of Norfolk, an active and forcible member of the body, immediately arose and stated with equal emphasis that, if he had not understood the resolution to be "prohibitive" in mild language, he would not have voted for it. Then Rev. Calvin N. Caldwell, from Hanchow, China, who had earnestly spoken in favor of the paper

adopted, was drawn into the colloquy. On "being asked if he would now receive into church communion a man who would refuse to give up polygamy, he replied that he would." Being asked if he would do so in the United States, he replied that he would not, and being asked, gave, as the reason of the difference in the two cases, that "The civil law in the United States prohibits polygamy." (In the Caldwell colloquy I have used the language taken down at the time by a commissioner.) This last response is doubly confusing, for "neither custom nor law allows a Chinese to have more than one legal wife, and if he transgresses he would be as promptly punished under the Chinese code as if convicted of bigamy under English law. (Chinese Code quoted, p. 63, "Pol. & Cit.") Moreover, it is confusing for an intelligent missionary to appeal to the civil law as justifying his refusal of a sealing church ordinance. All this shows a degradation of church sentiment astounding, and yet a similarly inconsistent appeal was made by the centenary Missionary Congress at Shanghai about a year ago, when the question of baptizing polygamist women (concubines) was dismissed on the ground that the law of China is monogamous.

Now, in what I have presented above, and say in what follows, I have endeavored and shall endeavor to render a service to such persons as may wish to form an intelligent opinion on the action of the Greensboro General Assembly. I should have stated two things additional: One is that when the Texas overture and the Bills and Overtures Committee report went to the docket, very few had left. This was a full and fair warning that the subject was bound to come up later. Hence there was no surprise. And the other is that more than two-thirds of the commissioners had left before the subject was

acted on. Only about 50 out of 201 remained. This discloses a shameful delinquency on the part of men who allowed themselves to be chosen in preference to others—chosen to attend to the business that should come before this Assembly—gentlemen whose expenses, amounting to thousands of dollars, were paid by the churches that they should give their time and attention to the business of the church. It is no light nor trifling matter for officers in the church to receive the money of the church for a given service and then default in its performance. It would seem very plain that polygamy is not the only curse that is blighting our church. It is vain to speak of any justifiable reason for more than two-thirds of the commissioners who accepted their appointments and the pay of their expenses, being absent at the close, when the close was on Friday and as early as the body is ever expected to close. Men's consciences and sense of what is right and proper should supply all the adjectives that can properly characterize such a situation. And yet is is hardly exceptional.

The fact that this action was taken when only a faithful few were present, would naturally incline one to speak softly of it. But the church is entitled to know that it was put through by what may, without offence, be called a "rump" Assembly, a broken-up Assembly. Only think of the indisposition at the last hour, to consider on its merit anything. Before action, Elder Harrison moved that the whole subject be referred to an ad-interim committee of five, with the moderator as chairman. The moderator was proceeding to submit this motion, supposing it had been seconded, when some one checked him because it had no second. And, strangely enough, no second was given to sustain this motion to secure light on a subject touching which, after all

that has been said and done, there is prevalent crass ignorance. An ad interim committee of investigation has been asked for from the General Assemblies again and again.* But no, everything possible happens to stifle information and discussion therein. But it will not down till disposed of righteously. "A conspiracy of silence" on such a vital and vexed question cannot win, for

Right is right and God is God,
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin.

One of our ministers writes me, "The action of our late Assembly is no better than that of 1904." It will be recalled that it was against that action that the Texas overture came up to this Assembly. I agree with him, for the difference is purely incidental and of no effective value. Again, its equivocal import provokes the following description: "It is a disgraceful juggling and a shameful shuffle."

Whatever others may think or say on this unfortunate and confusing deliverance, which will simply set our people by the ears, and be a send-off for additional discussion, instead of settling the subject by a straightforward and constitutional declaration to

* My book of 227 octavo pages, entitled "*Polygamy and Citizenship in Church and State*," was prepared to assist an ad interim committee asked for by a complaint to the Assembly of 1906 against the action of the Synod of Virginia approving of the Mobile deliverance of 1904—the same Assembly action that the Texas overture now complains of. But the formal and urgent petition for this committee was ignored. And the Birmingham Assembly of 1907 also fell back on the broken reed of 1904, which, for these years, has been piercing the very vitals of our church. "How long, O Lord?"

the effect that *the law of our church defines polygamy as adultery and forbids the toleration of adultery in our communion,* when I consider the wholly insignificant character of the result, enwrapped though it be in a bedizening cloud of pious and sentimental platitudes, after years of labor expended upon it, by conferences, church courts and newspapers, I am forcibly reminded of a sarcastic utterance of Horace:

"Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus—The mountains labored in the throes of parturition and brought forth a ridiculous mouse." (*Ars Poetica,* v. 139.)

The Curry mouse will doubtless have its place in history as an instance showing how not to do it, if peace, happiness and purity are to be the consequences. It is, in my judgment, wholly unsuited and inadequate to meet the inexorable demands of the situation of the church as "the pillar and ground of the Truth."

However, in mitigation of the situation I will close by giving,

THE PHILOSOPHY OF SELF-CONTRADICTION.

It is accepted as an inexorable law of psychology and of logic, that the mind cannot consciously accept as true and believe at the same time contradictories: e. g., that at the same moment a thing is and it is not; that it is now raining and that it is not now raining; that this is a statue or portrait of George Washington and that it is not, etc., ad infinitum. Also that the denial of one contradictory is the affirmation of the other, and the affirmation of one is the denial of the other. As truth and falsehood are contradictories, the affirmation of the truth of a proposition is a denial of its falsehood. To affirm or assert that God is only unipersonal is a denial that

he is tripersonal: to affirm monotheism is a denial of polytheism; and just as surely, to affirm monogamy as of divine ordination, is a thus saith the Lord against Polygamy as of divine ordaining. This is the very gist of our Lord's argument in refutation of his caviling enemies, and in vindication of the inviolable sacredness of the monogamous conjugal relation.

And yet even ordained teachers of the Word of God ramble around, holding an open Bible in both hands, asking and asking, Who will show us a thus saith the Lord against polygamy? Such blind leaders would do well to refresh their minds with a review of the elements of sound thinking and reasoning.

When we see the not uncommon spectacle of persons holding, at the same time or in close consecution proclaiming, contradictory views, as illustrated in what precedes, are we to set them down as hypocrites indulging conscious duplicity and destitute of honest sincerity? This is possible and in some cases undoubtedly actual; but it is by no means necessarily the case. As somewhat relieving the vexatious problem which such cases present, I would be pleased to ask the attention of their merciless critics to Professor Fullerton's *Introduction to Philosophy,* p. 33, for a kindly and apt solution of this perplexing problem. The Professor there says:

"It is quite possible to believe contradictory things when one's thoughts of them are somewhat vague, and when one does not consciously bring them together."

I submit that this well expresses the philosophy of much inconsistency and self-contradiction on the part of many poor, weak souls, who allow others to do their thinking for them and lack the healthy mental

vim to digest into consistency what false customs and misleading precedents and teachers have stuffed into them. Otherwise it would not be possible for honest and honorable men to avow their adhesion to the monogamy of the Word of God as explicitly laid down in our standards and then strike hands with polygamy; to hear the word of the Lord: "Be ye clean that bear the vessels of Jehovah," and then turn around and befoul themselves with the uncleanness of unrenounced polygamous adultery in administering a sealing ordinance of our holy religion; to require of applicants for admission into the Church of God by baptism to solemnly covenant, resolve and promise, in humble reliance upon the grace of the Holy Spirit, to forsake all sin and conform their lives to the teaching and example of Christ (Direc. Wor., x, 5), and then turn around and baptize persons in heathen lands clinging to and refusing to renounce the "heinous sin" of polygamy, as shown above; to pronounce a given practice or custom "essentially contrary to the teaching of Christ," and then to lead the way in providing to leave it to the discretion of any individual missionary to impiously nullify Christ's teachings instead of obeying the great commission and teaching and requiring the converts to observe all things whatsoever Christ has commanded us.

In taking leave of several commissioners who had voted, only a few minutes before, for the *"Ridiculus mus,"* I took occasion to say to them: "Well, brethren, you have hung a millstone around the neck of our Southern Church." Such was my impression at the moment, and such it is still. The rotten cord, however, that now holds it there will yet be broken, I opine.

I unhesitatingly proclaim it as unanswerably true, that the only way of evolving or extricating our

Church from its present inconsistent and absurd position is to resolve ourselves into a congregational body by burning our Constitution, which would, of course, legitimate the dominance of the individual missionary or missionary churches; or, failing to do that, then consistently and honestly stand up to our Standards as they are and make good before God and the world our proud profession as Presbyterians. The separation from the Union with the Congregationalists, in 1837, is the classic proof that, whilst each of the two systems has its virtues, they are as policies as incompatible as oil and water in the same vessel. They cannot be successfully worked together in the same organization. The organization must be all Presbyterian or all Congregational. Our people, I am satisfied, give their money for Presbyterian Missions, and it is not strictly so used; it is scattered under an alien flag. This is not fair dealing. I crave and ask no favors, but insist on fair-dealing and truth.

Bearing in mind that the Bible and our Church standards characterize polygamy as the sin of adultery, let us recall several things, as—

1. Our own church and the religious world as well are entitled to know more about this proceeding than can be learned from the minutes of the General Assembly, or the current notices of the busy editors. And this review is designed, however imperfectly, to meet this demand.

2. The documents submitted are formally authenticated. Dr. Curry's paper No. 1, when withdrawn did not pass back into his own hand, but evidently into the hand of the newspaper man. The printing of his signature and a somewhat faithful memory certify to its verbal accuracy as given.

3. We have seen that the confusion of mind that feared out in the colloquy. It discloses a profound

lack of unanimity and a measure of misunderstanding which are proofs positive of unfitness to make a wise deliverance; and also the worse than folly of refusing to invoke the deliberate aid of an An Interim Committee.

4. It becomes more and more manifest that the discontent is deep seated and widespread and will not down till lawfully disposed of.

5. It is not and cannot be satisfactory to the church, as long as a spark of religious freedom and a sense of right and duty remain alive in it, for an assembly to turn its back on the standard and complaisantly and affectionately enjoin *advice* where the very law of its existence and authority calls for a direct and unequivocal injunction of *prohibition.* (Con. F. xxiv: 1 & L Cal. Q. 139.)

6. It is not fair but fraudulent dealing with the heathen, for the church to allow its ministers the discretion of countenancing, under any circumstances, their native customs or practices, such as "polygamy or any form of idolatry which are essentially contrary to the teachings of Christ." The surprise is that conservative and sound-minded missionaries do not appeal to the General Assembly to exercise its legitimate and dutiful authority to restrain by positive enactment the freaky brethren, of whom some examples have been given.

7. Our religion knows but one gospel and one moral code for all men: "Go ye therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptising them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you." Christianity is thorough-goingly one and a missionary religion both at home and abroad.

8. In all our church work we are the servants of our Lord who is the way, the truth and the life.

Truth is speculative or practical. If speculative truth consists in the conformity of our convictions to the reality of things; and practical truth in the conformity of our expressions by word or action to our convictions, then, this deliverance, viewed in relation to the constitution, the condition and the mind of our church, is conceived to be not truthful either speculatively or practically. It is an impediment, it is a millstone. Instead of rescuing and saving our church from trouble, it sows the wind with the promise of a whirlwind harvest.

9. Consistency with the truth is alone the gem of great price. Pride of self-consistency is the *bete noir*—the black beast, the night mare—the pernicious demon of blind selfishness and purblind self-conceit. Recently, in recognizing publicly the manly and honorable courage of one of our most distinguished missionaries in changing his position on this subject from tolerance to intolerance, I used the following language which I here repeat: "I rejoice to see it, and honor him for it. On our view of fallen man, self consistency would send the adult portion of our race to perdition. The jewel is not self-consistency, but consistency with the truth. It would be good for the record of others to make a like disclaimer."

I repeat this that I may say that I have virtually passed through a like experience. For many years I was, like the ministers generally, in a state of ease in regard to our missions. I gave my money and offered my prayers in the undisturbed faith that all was regular and right, and I rejoiced to see others do the same. But in the course of time the abnormal family conditions among our Indians and in Utah and at large as revealed in divorce suits caused the questions involved in the conjugal relation to confront us publicly in both our politics and our relig-

ion. Converging circumstances, therefore, aroused me to make an independent study and re-study of the subject not merely as a social or political question, but as it lies in the Bible and in the history of the church. At last I found myself startled and amazed, on learning that the very perversion of this vital family institution which was deemed so threatening and perilous to our country was nursed and tolerated among the heathen in our church missions, though contrary to our church law.

The result of this labor, I have made accessible at my own financial cost, in the face of incredible apathy, opposition and some misrepresentation, but cheered by a goodly measure of appreciation.

My main desire and purpose have been to be of some service, especially to my younger brethren in the ministry. I have passed my 84th birthday but I still hope to see our Southern Church, and perhaps others, pass from under the cloud that has for some years gathered over it.

10. But I cannot leave this subject without requesting the reader to turn back and read over document No. 3, and deliberately compare it once more with documents Nos. 1, 2, 4, and 5, and ask yourself, in view of the actual situation, whether this substitute, offered by Elder Dabney Carr Harrison, Commissioner from the Second Presbyterian Church, Washington, D. C., is not the only one of the lot that meets the requirements of the actual condition of things? Harrison's paper is complete and sound, and all the others are partial and defective.

In Africa and China, for example, our missionaries are in their discretion baptizing polygamists and may continue to do so without requiring its renunciation, receiving them into Christian communion as a means of their reformation.

Harrison's paper, as does Curry No. 1, forbids this. But missionaries are, in Africa and China, also living with and cherishing these persons in actual adulterous polygamy as Christian communicants. Harrison's paper alone provides against both these evils; and neither the Overture, the answer of the Committee of Bills and Overtures, nor either of Dr. Curry's papers, makes any such provision. Dr. Curry may now see why Harrison declined to withdraw his in favor of the Curry substitute. In a word, Elder Harrison's paper alone was worthy of the adoption of the General Assembly; yet it was bluntly and curtly pushed aside. All this is apparent on the face of the narration as given above, and shows confusion and a failure of duty. The paper adopted does not interdict either of the evils indicated which are giving us trouble. It is as pernicious to tolerate by consorting with polygamous adultery as to baptize it; so far as this Greensboro deliverance of our General Assembly is concerned, our missionaries are still at liberty to do both, and doubtless they will do both, at their discretion, as avowed by the missionary in the colloquy.

SAMUEL SPAHR LAWS.

Washington, D. C., June 19, 1908.

P. S.—"In a judicial case and in every deliverance of the General Assembly it is not permissible to dissent from the standards as the authoritative exposition of God's word. And on the subject of polygamy, which is the *gravamen* of this charge and case, it is proposed to cite two passages from these standards which are so explicit in setting forth the law of our church, which law inexorably binds every one of our church courts and individual church members, lay or clerical, so plainly and unequivocably as to preclude the need of argument and render comment superfluous:

"1st. Confession of Faith, chapter XXIV., on Marriage and Divorce, section one is in these words: "Marriage is to be between one man and one woman; neither is it lawful for any man to have more than one wife, nor for any woman to have more than one husband at the same time."

"2nd. This is buttressed by the answer to Q. 139 of the Larger Catechism. I quote:

" 'What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment: Thou shalt not commit adultery? Answer: The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are adultery, fornication, etc., having more wives or husbands than one at the same time.'

"It may be remarked that this is the doctrine of even natural religion, and not simply of Christianity. As the Saviour expounds it, the conjugal relation of one man and one woman was ordained at creation for the race of man, and, therefore, every departure therefrom by even the heathen is sinful, though it be a sin of ignorance. And the Christ did not claim to originate monogamy, but proclaimed it as God's original and universal law, and sanctified it as the law of his spiritual kingdom."—*From the pending Grier Indictment.*

Polygamy